

Point of View: In Oklahoma, marijuana legalization dangers to come

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Oklahoma has become the 30th state to legalize “medical” marijuana. Marijuana is legal for recreational use in nine states and for medical use in 30.

On the surface, it seems there is widespread support for legalization. However there also is movement in the other direction. In the past two years, Illinois, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Arkansas, Missouri and Delaware have rejected bills to legalize marijuana in some form. On June 21, the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee rejected sending legislation to the floor that would have allowed marijuana company accounts in U.S. banks. A week earlier, the House Appropriations Committee voted down a parallel bill. Senators and House members didn't want “big marijuana” to become the same as “big tobacco.”

States are now discovering the impact of “drugged driving.” The Denver Post showed that high levels of marijuana were found in an increasing amount of drivers who died in wrecks. The drivers who survived had the drug in their system and had been using it within hours of their accident.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's report on motor vehicle crashes in Colorado found that between 2013 and 2016, the number of drivers involved in deadly accidents increased by 40 percent. The number of drivers with marijuana in their system during those crashes more than doubled. In 20 percent of fatal crashes in 2016, at least one driver tested positive.

In Colorado, according to NBC News, after legalization, emergency room visits by teens increased fourfold between 2005 and 2015.

Peter Kissinger, President of AAA's Foundation for Traffic Safety, warned that Washington served as “an eye opening case study” for other states. The Washington Traffic Safety Commission noted in April this year that fatal crashes as a result of marijuana more than doubled from 2012 to 2016.

Misinformation about this issue is similar to laetrile in the 1970s. Some believed that laetrile, from nuts and fruit seeds, helped to cure cancer. It was legalized in 22 states. The New York Times showed that it discouraged people from real treatment. NCI learned that the disease grew in half of the participants during a study. Seven months later, cancer had continued to grow in all.

One of the most oft-cited benefits for those in favor of legalizing marijuana is the myth that it's a cure for cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, when studies are run on human participants, the drug does not have the same slowing effect.

Proponents of legalization also say that marijuana is non-addictive. In fact, the National Institute on Drug Abuse found that 17 percent of teenagers who begin using it become addicted to it at some point.

Oklahoma, beware: The data from others show that traffic accidents, addictions and hospital emergency room visits are about to increase.

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